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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000503

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SUBJECT: TURKEY'S EU ACCESSION PROCESS CREEPS FORWARD
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[1](#)B. ANKARA 59

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b),(d)
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[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment: Turkish academics and civil society activists are voicing frustration at the slow pace of EU membership-related reforms. They charge the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) is putting its "pet projects," such as lifting the headscarf ban at universities, ahead of long-promised accession reforms. The government's delayed reform agenda is leading many activists, as well as European Union contacts, to conclude PM Erdogan is committed only to AKP's "Sunni-centric" agenda, despite his stated commitment to enact all EU-mandated reforms. Other contacts maintain AKP's six-year track record, including continuing economic and technical-level actions, belie any such "hidden agenda." They attribute the recent slow-down to Erdogan's sense of timing for introducing reforms, and a full schedule that keeps him from resolving internal AKP divisions on several contentious issues. AKP's pledge to incorporate EU-related reforms in an overhauled constitution is losing credibility as that project languishes. Demands for action will likely increase the longer the government appears consumed by the headscarf issue and resistant to implementing European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) decisions. End Summary and comment.

GOT Needs to Move on "Neglected" Reforms

[1](#)2. (SBU) Voicing frustration over a slowdown in EU-mandated political reforms, a group of more than 100 prominent Turkish academics, journalists, and artists recently signed a declaration urging the government immediately to enact long-promised reforms, such as amendment of Article 301 (insulting "Turkishness"). Former Ambassador Ilter Turkmen, Hrant Dink's widow Rakel Dink, author Oya Baydar, women's rights activist Selma Acuner columnist Cengiz Candar, professor Baskin Oran and others stated that with elections over and the headscarf amendments enacted, the government has no more reasons to delay. The group called on the GOT to demonstrate that its understanding of freedom is not limited to its own "pet projects." Referring to FM Babacan's January announcement that 2008 would be the "year of the EU", the group demanded concrete steps.

EU's Expectations and Skepticism

13. (SBU) The European Commission's February 18 Revised Accession Partnership Agreement outlines rule of law and human rights reforms the EU expects Turkey to take over the next one-to-two years, including:

- Strengthening local administrations by devolving powers to local governments;
- Improving civilian control of the military;
- Ensuring the judiciary interprets human rights legislation in line with ECHR case law;
- Establishing an independent, adequately-resourced national human rights institution;
- Revising and implementing legislation on freedom of expression in line with the European Convention on Human Rights;
- Taking concrete steps to protect religious freedom;
- Implementing current legislation relating to women's rights; and
- Improving effective access to radio and TV broadcasting in languages other than Turkish.

14. (C) EC Political Counselor Diego Mellado told us he expects the GOT will move ahead with economic and technical-level reforms but slow roll with human rights measures. Having observed a distinct slow-down in political reforms in the last several years, Mellado is not convinced AKP "has internalized" western European human rights principles; he doubts AKP genuinely wants to implement these societal reforms.

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AKP's Professed Commitment to EU Accession

15. (SBU) AKP leaders repeatedly maintain they are committed to making reforms necessary for Turkey's full EU membership. In a February 29 speech to EU Ambassadors, Erdogan remarked, "Full membership to the EU has always been, and will continue to be, the fundamental priority of our government. We are determined." He then described his government's preparations for a "new, more freedom-oriented Constitution," and his intention to implement other EU-mandated reforms, such as revision of Article 301. Turkey's Chief EU Negotiator, FM Ali Babacan, told the press February 2, "Turkey is a country which has to make progress in the field of rights and freedom. It is a country which has to make political reforms in order to become a full member of the EU."

16. (C) Contacts in Turkey's EU Secretariat General (EUSG), assigned as intra-governmental coordinator of Turkey's accession, also maintain the GOT is committed to enacting reforms. EUSG political counselor Cem Kahyaoglu said Turkey is taking necessary steps to open at least two chapters during the Slovenian Presidency (Chapter 7 Intellectual Property, and Chapter 6 Company Law), and up to four during the French Presidency (Chapter 17 Economic and Monetary Policy, Chapter 26 Education and Culture, Chapter 16 Taxation, and Chapter 4 Free Movement of Capital). He noted the GOT also is pushing ahead on social security reform, an important EU requirement. Kahyaoglu acknowledged a slowdown in political reforms, and said the EUSG lacks sufficient clout to push for necessary changes.

Internal AKP Conflict Slows Political Reforms

17. (C) PM Erdogan alone makes the critical decisions on EU reforms, according to GOT and EC contacts. FM Babacan lacks political clout to resolve internal AKP divisions and propel the EU agenda, according to the EUSG's Kahyaoglu. Babacan's dual role as FM and lead EU negotiator hinders his ability to build networks in Europe to elevate Turkey's accession on a

political level. Kahyaoglu said Babacan's two hats prevent him from bringing the necessary intensity to his EU role; he noted Croatia's lead negotiator visits Brussels at least once a week, while Babacan's visits are far less frequent. Several contacts believe the reform process lost steam with former FM Abdullah Gul's elevation to president; Gul is generally recognized as the AKP official who best understands Europeans and EU institutions.

18. (C) Opinions diverge on Erdogan's commitment to EU accession. Kilicer, disappointed by the slowed reforms, contends Erdogan does not truly want or understand European-style freedoms, but is using the process to advance AKP's agenda. The PM's numerous lawsuits against political cartoonists for lampooning him show an intolerant attitude, she said. Human Rights Agenda Association President Orhan Cengiz told us Erdogan supports EU membership only as a tool to pursue AKP's Sunni-centric agenda. Cengiz believes Erdogan showed his fundamental intolerance when he failed to attend the funeral of Hrant Dink.

19. (C) In contrast, EC political officer Serap Ocak told us Erdogan sees EU membership as the best way to elevate Turks' living standards, and is genuinely committed to the accession process. She attributes the slow pace of reforms to Erdogan's awareness of rising nationalism, intolerance by the man-on-the-street, and persistent perceptions by Turks that the EU is not treating Turkey's candidacy fairly. Erdogan will be guided by his political instincts on the timing of controversial reforms such as re-opening Greek Orthodox Halki Seminary, she argued.

110. (C) Conflict among Erdogan's inner-circle of advisors also has delayed reforms, according to Ocak. Advisors recently disagreed on how or whether to amend Article 301 as well as how to respond to the recent Council of State (Danistay) ruling that mandatory religious courses are unconstitutional (reftels). Ocak noted that Egemen Bagis, AKP Foreign Policy Advisor, frequently had advocated progressive positions on EU reforms while staunchly

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nationalist Deputy PM Cemil Cicek often had taken reactionary positions. Following the academics' March 2 declaration, Cicek sarcastically asked reporters, "Should we put the note 'this is for the EU' in front of every piece of legislation we issue?"

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